



# The Weekly Wrap Up

January 13, 2006

From Viola Miller, Commissioner for  
The Tennessee Department of Children's Services

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## The Myth of the 45-Day Release Date

Helping children and families achieve permanency is an awesome responsibility, and one that can all too often just become plain overwhelming. Sometimes, however, we make that responsibility more difficult than necessary because we do not understand a policy or think one exists that simply does not. The urban legend of the 90-day trial home visit addressed a couple of weeks ago is just one such example. Another is the myth of the 45-day release date.

I am certain that many of you have heard that a child/youth must wait 45 days to be released from a program AFTER the discharge Child and Family Team Meeting. For those of you who have heard this, have you ever stopped to think why we would require that and then did a little research? If so, then you would have quickly discovered that there is no such policy. **In fact, nowhere in DCS policy is a specific timeframe dictated in which to release a child/youth from a program.** There are, however, some guidelines on when an agency should complete discharge paperwork, when the case manager should submit the discharge paperwork to the committing Court, and how much notice a case manager should give to Central Office; and it will all depend on the adjudication of the child/youth.

For delinquent youth, there must first be the discharge Child and Family Team Meeting. Anyone can request this meeting, but only DCS can convene it, and it must be convened within seven days of the date of the request. If the child/youth is in a contract agency program, DCS group home, or a Youth Development Center, then the appropriate release forms and documents must be completed by the program case manager and submitted to the home county case manager 60 days prior to the date of the youth's trial home visit or release from DCS supervision. Please note that this does not mean that we make a youth "sit out" the 60 days in a program after the youth's completion of the program. It simply means that we do our tasks timely so as not to delay release or step-down. The next step is to notify the committing Court of the proposed placement at least 15 days prior to the trial home pass date. Finally (and

contingent upon approval from the Court) the home county case manager will submit a release packet for the Commissioner's review and will notify the agency when/if the release packet is approved. This is not a comprehensive listing of all responsibilities. Please refer to Administrative Policies and Procedures: 12.1 for further details.

For dependent/neglected and unruly children/youth, there must first be the discharge Child and Family Team Meeting. As with delinquent youth, anyone can request this meeting, but only DCS can convene it, and it must be convened within seven days of the date of the request. The criteria outlined in Administrative Policies and Procedures: 16.12 must be considered in evaluating the appropriateness of the return to the home of the parents or caretakers. If all parties of the Child and Family Team agree to the return home, then the home county case manager must confer with the regional legal counsel regarding the trial home visit and release. In turn, the legal counsel will submit the appropriate paperwork to the committing Court 15 days prior to the beginning of the trial visit or by such time as required by the rules of the Court. Again, this is not a comprehensive listing of all responsibilities. Please refer to Policy 16.12 for further details.

Believing bad information about our policies – especially those surrounding release of children from programs and even custody – and acting on that information can create artificial barriers to our children and families achieving permanency. Please be mindful that what you hear many not always have any factual basis, and you should always seek clarification of DCS policies if you have any questions. You can access our policies on the intranet, and we encourage you to review them regularly. After all, knowing policy well will ultimately benefit our children and families.

-- AMY COOPER

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## Accreditation: A New Way to Do Business

Accreditation is not just another initiative, but a standard that everyone should embrace as the way we do business. Accreditation initiatives of the entire agency will see improved outcome. As the Department makes plans to pursue COA accreditation, the regions must begin to prepare their staff for the importance of achieving such an honorable accomplishment.

The accreditation process will take place region by region but cannot be fully accomplished without all regions successfully completing certain required tasks. This is not only a statewide goal but should be a personal goal for every region and for every staff member within DCS. Conversations must begin now about the meaning of COA accreditation and why it is so important for our agency.

Although the national standards were developed for public child welfare agencies to use as a measurement tool for improvement, they should also be embraced as individual goals. Improving the quality of our casework and finding permanency for all our children goes hand in hand with the requirements of an accredited agency. COA accreditation is not just another initiative, but a set of standards that everyone should embrace as the way we do business at DCS. The end results will ultimately mean improved outcomes for our children and families, which is something we can all be proud of. – **CARLA AARON**

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## Our Team Coordinator, D. Sue Rickman

None better, if you could pick them.

Keeping things in tow

We don't understand how she does more than just go.

She asks questions and challenges one and all

Because she wants the best cluster of all.

She's in touch with her staff and cases as best she can

Often has to go to meetings with reports in hand.

She praises her staff often,

Lifting them before they fall,

She says that was TC's should do after all.

She works each day and goes to school,

A MSSW is what she is striving to do.

We wish her and we know she can do it

Because she is committed, dedicated and will stick to it.

We're so lucky to have her and Thankful as you can see

We love our beloved Sue our Cluster T.C.

---**Foster Care and JJ Staff**

**Chester, Decatur, Hardin, Henderson and McNairy counties**

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## Cleaner, Newer Policy Postings

Beginning in January 2006, DCS policies will be posted to the Web using a new, cleaner format. This new policy format will continue to provide much of the same information you are accustomed to seeing in policy documents. The Commissioner's signature will not be included on future policies posted to the Web. However, all policies posted in the new format are approved policies with signatures on file. More information on DCS policy will be published as it becomes available! -- **PETRINA JONES-JESZ**

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## Craftsmen at Taft

Instructor Dexter Hale's Masonry Class at Taft Youth Center recently completed this beautiful fireplace. The students studied the basic masonry steps and advanced their skills wonderfully. Students Jerry Flores, Jimmy Ogle and Ryan Snyder all worked very hard and are proud of their accomplishments. We are also very proud of Ryan. He has taken the initiative to complete the requirements for certification through the National Center for Construction Education and Research in Construction Core and Masonry1. The NCCER training program at Taft is sponsored by the Middle Tenn. Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc.

-- **CAROL MUSCARNERO**

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Submissions: [EIWEEKLYWRAP](#) in Groupwise.